

Sermon ✝ July 25, 2021

John 6:1-21

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I begin this morning with some facts about hunger:

- 821 million people around the world - that's more than 1 in 10 - can't access the food they need to live active, healthy lives.
- According to the most recent estimates, 736 million people live in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 per day. That's 10% of the world's population.
- At some point in 2017 (the most recent year available), more than 40 million people in the United States were unsure where their next meal might come from.
- 39.7 million Americans were living in poverty in 2017. For a family of four, this means their annual household income was below \$25,094

Another fact: all of us here had a healthy breakfast this morning . . . and if we didn't have one . . . we could have.

Another fact: Jesus fed the hungry. Christ fed the multitude.

Another fact: We may not be able to feed all of the hungry people of the world, but we do have the capacity to be touched by the power of God.

This is a familiar gospel story. With variations, it is found in all four gospels. This is a story that parallels or anticipates the actions of Jesus at The Last Supper. None of the accounts assert that Jesus actually multiplied the food. Perhaps others were moved to share. Perhaps the real miracle was the love that Jesus was able to generate in and through the gathered crowd.

Other important aspects to this story. It contains three levels (or depths) Basic: People who are hungry receive food. Advanced: The bread is symbolic of Jesus being "the bread of life". The final level is the presence of the Spirit . . . this is no ordinary picnic. Something very special and significant is happening here.

This event is also a sign. It harkens back to 2 Kings 4:42-44 where Elisha feeds the hundred. It points forward . . . to the future . . . to the advent of a new age when God intervenes to save the people. It points to the cross and resurrection. It points to the holy meal yet to come . . . the Eucharist . . . the Lord's supper . . . the Great Thanksgiving.

This sign is discernable to the eyes of faith as it sees a God who is continually active in history. At its core, this story is about *doing* love / love that is active.

We see in this story the importance of unimportant people. Christ valued *and values* all people . . . no exceptions. The boy with the fish and loaves is symbolic of Christ's regard for all of humanity. (*At this point in time, adults did not inter-act with children . . . which makes this even more remarkable*).

Not even money could feed the crowd. There wasn't a grocery store nearby . . . they weren't in the parking lot at mall with easy access to the food court. They were out in the country . . . up on a mountain. And, in that day, whenever people traveled, they would carry food with them . . . but being very human . . . sharing their food with total strangers was probably not their custom.

And so . . . Jesus took the bread and the fish . . . and began to share the food with the hungry crowd. The true miracle might have been that the people, witnessing the actions of Jesus, were moved to share their food.

This is a story about the transcendent power of God. By example, Christ has shown us how to live . . . how to multiply our resources. We cannot feed all of the hungry people of the world, but we can be touched by the power and the love of God *and* . . . we can pass it on.

A number of years ago, I was at a Lutheran Youth Gathering in Minneapolis.

- This was so long ago that the term "rap" was not used to refer to a music form, but rather "rapping" was conversation.
- In one of our "break-out" sessions, I was "rapping" with some of the kids in attendance at the gathering.
- During our conversation, one of the kids said something that I have always remembered. He said that he had heard many sermons on love, but yet he had never been told what to do.

I began today citing some statistics regarding hunger, I feel obligated to also pass along a few things that we can do to help alleviate hunger. For starters, you can pray. Praying not only puts us in touch with the Creator, it also brings us closer to those for whom we pray. Learn more about the plight of the hungry. Google "world hunger" on your computer.

Commit your time and financial resources. Volunteer in a food program: Meals on Wheels . . . soup kitchen. Share your concerns with your representatives in congress. Let them know how you feel. We have also posted a list of present needs for the Door of Life Food Pantry on our website.

The story of Jesus feeding the five thousand is more than just some gigantic magic trick where people are amazed, ask "How did he do that?" and then go on their way. This is one of those gospel stories that underscores the transforming power of God.

Jesus reaches out to us and provides. Jesus reaches out to us and he teaches. He stretches out his arms, encompassing the world in his caring, nurturing, loving embrace.

The lesson for today is about *doing* love. Love should be our response to the love that has been shared with us. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, "*This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.*"